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Oxford Word of the Month – July: Anzac Day rule

noun: a tradition that heaters should not be used in Canberra before Anzac Day.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

An Australian Government website on energy use has a page headed: ‘Your energy bill and the ANZAC Day rule’, and provides the following advice:

Unknown to ACT outsiders, an ancient practice dictates the date on which heaters all across the capital turn on. This tradition, passed from family to family, household to household, takes no cues from nature: temperatures fall, lawns frost and leaves change, but the heaters remain off. All good Canberrians [sic] wait patiently until ANZAC Day to turn on their heaters, lest shame befall their houses by turning them on too soon. (Energy Made Easy)

This tongue-in-cheek guidance serves a more serious purpose in providing information on how to help consumers save on energy bills as the weather begins to cool. But it also suggests that there is a notional ‘rule’ that many long-term residents of Canberra know about.

In the weeks leading up to Anzac Day, Canberra typically starts to experience much cooler nights and mornings, and the deciduous trees throughout the city begin to shed their leaves. On Anzac Day itself, the dawn service at the Australian War Memorial often sees crowds well rugged up as temperatures hover around freezing point. The ‘rule’ can be seen as a way of displaying one’s fortitude in the face of gradually falling temperatures:

One of established Canberrans’ greatest joys at this time of the year is to tell horrified newcomers of the ‘Anzac Day rule’ for heating. To use a heater, fire or electric heater before April 25 is a sign of weakness, the rule decrees, as the public holiday marks the true start of the wintry weather that will only ease up in mid-spring. (Canberra Times, 30 April 2017)

The tradition of not turning on heating appliances in Canberra until Anzac Day appears to have been around for decades, but the term to describe the tradition is more recent. **Anzac Day rule** now seems to be well known in Canberra (and perhaps elsewhere), as these comments from an internet forum suggest:

I had never heard the Anzac Day rule until we moved to Canberra. It’s a pretty

good guide to when the weather gets cold here but I wouldn't wait until then if it was cold.

My mum is a stickler for the ANZAC Day rule. I ignore it completely.

My nan had the Anzac Day rule here in SA. (Essential Baby, 12 April 2014)

Anzac Day rule will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*. The Australian National Dictionary Centre is looking for earlier evidence of the term **Anzac Day rule**. If you have any information about it, please contact: andc@anu.edu.au

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